



COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL SERVICES, VETERANS, CULTURE, AND RECREATION
AND THE NORTHAMPTON CITY COUNCIL

Councilor Marianne LaBarge, Chair

Councilor Alisa F. Klein

Councilor Gina-Louise Sciarra

MEETING MINUTES

Monday December 15, 2014

4:00 pm

City Council Chambers, 212 Main Street

Wallace J. Puchalski Municipal Building, Northampton, MA

1. Members present/absent: Present: *Councilor Marianne LaBarge, Chair, Councilor Alisa F. Klein, Councilor Gina-Louise Sciarra* Absent: *None*
2. Meeting Called to Order: At 4:00 pm Councilor LaBarge called the meeting to order.
3. Announcement of Audio/Video Recording of Meeting: Councilor LaBarge announced that the meeting would be recorded.
4. Approval of Minutes from November 17, 2014 Councilor Klein moved to approve the minutes of the previous meeting; Councilor Sciarra seconded the motion. The motion was approved on a voice vote of 3 Yes, 0 No.
5. The Committee reviewed notes from the Public Hearings; Councilor Klein recapped her notes of September 15, 2014 regarding who spoke and what concerns each person spoke about.
 - Natalia Munoz supports having benches installed in downtown Florence and more benches installed in downtown Northampton.
 - Patte Shaughnessy supports installation of benches in Florence and more benches in Downtown Northampton. She feels these are vital for seniors and people with disabilities or illnesses who need the opportunity to stop and rest.
 - Debin Bruce is bothered by the infrastructure of city streets and how poorly the streets are maintained. She feels that having more people around tends to invite more positive interactions on City Streets.
 - Todd Ford spoke that vibrancy can only happen where there are people. He spoke about traffic calming & more street trees and made similar comments to Ms. Bruce regarding the City's infrastructure.
 - Ruth McGrath feels that benches in downtown Florence are important. She feels that more benches would attract people to shop.
 - Jonathon Wynn said that we need to make places attractive by incorporating art objects that people can dialogue about, add more seating. Mr. Wynn also spoke about using the word "encounter" rather than "confrontation"
 - Adam Dunetz is a downtown business owner. He hopes that the group can acknowledge that this is a complex issue and feels that adding benches may not create the desired effect. He said that adding more benches doesn't necessarily increase accessibility. Councilor Sciarra interpreted what Mr. Dunetz said that businesses find it difficult to operate when people congregate for long periods of time outside a business.
 - Michael Nagy suggested that 2 or 3 foot ramps that can be made available to the disabled will allow for greater accessibility to city businesses. However, Councilor Klein felt that this level of detail did not belong in the resolution; Councilor LaBarge agreed.
 - Councilor Klein pointed out that one section of the resolution (under the second Whereas...) talks about movement of "pedestrians", however, she feels that this might not be the right term given that disabled individuals travel the sidewalks in wheelchairs, or some other form of mobility. Councilor Klein suggested "Sidewalks are how people move from one place to another."

- Councilor Klein suggested that something she would like to consider is, “the more people congregate, the more criminality is dispelled

The Committee reviewed the minutes of the Council Clerk and found that many bullet points were similar to what had already been talked about.

Next, the Committee reviewed the notes from the October 14, 2014 Public Hearing:

- Chris Polames talked about his concern for the upkeep of sidewalks, slope of the sidewalk, and the fact that benches with armrests are important. (Note: Councilor LaBarge informed everyone that benches with armrests have been ordered.
- Bud Stockwell said that we should not encourage panhandlers.
- Robert Ross said that he thinks that more benches are not necessary. Councilor LaBarge commented that Mr. Ross spoke about his own issues, but what he said did not represent the opinion of the Florence Civic and Business Association. Councilor Sciarra noted that all things should be considered, not just items the group was inclined to include.
- Suzanne Love spoke about making benches into art.
- Bill Newman talked about use of the word confrontation, and that perhaps there is a better word to represent what is really being talked about here, which is robust freedom of expression and assembly.
- Rutherford Platt thought that sidewalks were too narrow and that people are too packed together. He would like to make the crosswalks shorter.
- Debin Bruce would like sidewalks improved.
- The committee reviewed Resolution language presented by Councilor Adams and considered how his proposal would fit into the Resolution.
- Councilor Klein suggested that certain language from Bill Newman should be included in the resolution. Specifically, “Under Article 16 of the Massachusetts Declaration of Rights, freedom of expression is a protected activity.”
- The Committee also reviewed wording in the paragraph about survival. “Survival: for some people, the sidewalk is home and the only place where they can carry out the ordinary activities of daily life. Sidewalks are also the places where some people go to earn a living.”

The Committee reviewed suggested wording by Councilor Adams:

- Expression—Free speech, assembly and expression must be accommodated in public, even if some consider them disruptive, uncomfortable or confrontational. Discussion, debates, disagreements, protests, rallies and sit-ins, are all forms of expression that take place on democratic sidewalks.
- Final Paragraph Proposed Amendment
- Now therefore be it resolved that the Northampton City Council envisions sidewalks as spaces that can accommodate [here the language 'both enjoyable and disruptive' was removed by amendment] a variety of activities, and calls for the City to honor both the spirit and language of this Resolution, by, without limiting the generality of the foregoing, installing or placing additional street/sidewalk furniture along the entire length of Main Street and other commercial streets in the city.

To recap:

- The committee talked about adding language at the beginning of the Resolution so that the Resolution is inclusive of downtown Florence & Northampton.
- Change Pedestrians to People in second Whereas paragraph;

- Revise “confrontation” section by using Councilor Adams’ suggested language and also by adding a reference to Article 16 of the MA Bill of Rights. (Councilor Klein will review).
- Under survival, eliminating language pertaining to sidewalks being the “often controversial places where panhandlers, street vendors and day laborers congregate. Instead, use language that demonstrates that the City is mindful of the challenges that business owners may face in having customers access their establishment.
- Adding language about beautification of sidewalks, including artwork and natural elements (such as trees).
- Under movement, include general language that promotes access to a variety of establishment, such as churches, municipal buildings, offices, businesses, etc.
- Under commerce, use language that focuses on business access.
- Instead of Beauty, use the term “Vibrancy” which might include “Beauty”.

At 5:15 p.m. Councilor Klein made a motion to adjourn the meeting; Councilor Sciarra seconded the motion; the motion was approved on a voice vote of 3 Yes; 0 No.

6. Public Comment--None

7. NEW BUSINESS – *Reserved for topics that the Chair did not reasonably anticipate would be discussed.*

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